

YAO CHENGGUANG THEORY OF YIQUAN SHI LI



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THEORY OF

YIQUAN SHI LI

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YAO CHENGGUANG – THEORY OF YIQUAN SHI LI

When, after some practice of zhan zhuang you achieve first feelings and experience of hunyuan li – unified force, you should also start practicing shi li. In the term shi li, shi means ‘to test’, ‘to check’, li is the technical force in martial art. *“Testing force is the source of force”*. Only through testing and researching, getting rid of the false, and keeping what is true, getting rid of the rough, and absorbing the essence, you can deeply understand and fully develop the technical force in martial art. *“Zhan zhuang is basis, shi li is the key, the scope of shi li is widest, level of difficulty highest, in yiquan shi li is intermediate stage between basics and more advanced training. There relation between fighting skills and shi li training is very close”*. So learning yiquan, you should put a lot of attention to shi li.

Why should we practice shi li? Practicing zhan zhuang you are developing and enhancing hunyuan li in relatively static position. When body starts moving, the feeling of hunyuan li is often disappearing. Only after readjusting of position and mind activity, the feeling of hunyuan li appears again. Yao Zongxun said: *“If you haven’t got hunyuan li as a basis, there is no real combat skill. But it’s impossible to fight by standing in zhan zhuang posture. The hunyuan li, developed in zhan zhuang, must be transferred to moving situation, you must be able to use it also in rapid, fast changing movement. The task of transferring from non-movement to movement is done by shi li.”*

We can say, that shi li is a stage between zhan zhuang and fa li. We cannot omit this stage. If you want a plant to grow faster, you shouldn’t pull it up, as it will only make it wither. Impatience will badly affect the development of force which is needed in combat. So the goal of shi li is continuing, using appropriate mind activity, the developing and enhancing of hunyuan li in situation when whole body is moving – so when position is changing, you should still keep the feeling of full, unified force and be able to use it. This way you are getting basis for the ability of issuing force in any moment, any situation. Shi li is also a form of testing the quality of zhan zhuang practice. Quality of zhan zhuang affects quality of shi li. Zhan zhuang and shi li are mutually related, they affect each other. Shi li is enlarging of zhan zhuang – expanding it in space.

To be able to achieve the goals of shi li practice, you must remember about following points:

1. USING IMAGINATION AND MIND SUPPORT

In „Central axis of the way of fist” Wang Xiangzhai said about shi li: *„All forces are effect of focused mind, unity of internal and external. If you take one of them, not as a whole, martial art will become mechanic, the form will ‘break’ body, it will not be an art based on mind ... If we are talking about method of using force, they unified force – hunyuan li doesn’t depend on whether form is good or bad, whether movements are simple or complicated, but on how you are using support of mind and mental leading of your body, inside and outside”*. We can see that using mind is very important in shi li practice. When you are using imagination and mind support, you should remember about 3 points:

a) Stress should be put on wholeness of imagination work and mind support.

Developing and using of hunyuan li (the unity of opposing forces) is the core of yiquan. The main characteristics of hunyuan li is wholeness, which means that perception of force in whole body should be homogenous and abundant. It depends of coordinated cooperation of neural and muscles systems. The better this coordination, the more unified body. Wholeness of work of imagination and of mind support is the key for coordinating neural and muscles systems (the theoretical basis was explained in the chapter on zhan zhuang).

For example, practicing gougua shi li, you can imagine, that you are putting your palms and forearms into thick, sticky syrup. But if you concentrate on the feelings of hands only, there will be no wholeness, the effect will be partial. So you should imagine that your whole body is inside syrup (to extend the work of mind, you can imagine that whole universe is full of syrup). The syrup is so thick and sticky, that if you use only force of your hand, you will not be able to move it. It will become possible, and also with difficulty, if you use force of whole body. Practicing regularly in this way, you can more efficiently use mind activity for stimulating co-operation of whole neural and muscles systems, gradually achieving higher level of coordination between them, and making their cooperation more efficient.

b) Stress should be put on truthfulness of imagination work, and mind support.

When we are using work of imagination and support of mind in order to coordinate neural and muscles systems in a holistic way, stressing the truthfulness is the key. Why? If you are attacking opponent's head, by tapping him lightly, with smile on your face, will the effect be the same as when you are hitting him like a coiling dragon, like a billowing wave, with expression of power in your eyes? Some people, when they

are practicing shi li, are not focused enough, they look here and there, losing proper feeling during some parts of movement. Can such a practice stimulate neural and muscles systems efficiently? Would you be able to feel all the subtle changes in movement of your hands and body? Could you develop the expression of power needed in combat? The truthfulness of work of imagination directly affects the ability of using force and mental attitude during fight. The truthfulness of work of imagination means great level of concentration. *“When not moving, like a standing leopard, when moving, like coiling dragon, like billowing waves”*. When not moving, you should be like a leopard, ready to jump on its prey. When movement starts, it should be powerful and irresistible, like a billowing wave, like a coiling dragon. As an archer first must focus on the target, and only after “accumulating force” he can shoot. Moreover the movement must be slow and delicate. The more delicate is the movement, the better you can experience all the subtle changes in all parts of your body, when you are “swimming in air”. Deepness of this feeling indicates your level of concentration. It’s like when you are tasting tea – the slower you sip tea, the better you can feel its taste. How could you achieve the same feeling by gulping the whole cup at once? How could you express your focus on tasting the tea? So putting the stress on wholeness, even more stress should be put on truthfulness. This way you can more efficiently stimulate neural and muscles systems, making your training more efficient.

c) Stress should be put on stages of work with imagination, feelings and mind support.

In each process of development, there are various stages. Each stage has its own characteristics. The new elements of the characteristics, which were not present at previous stages, enable further development and moving to next stage. So when beginning practice of shi li, you can imagine that you are standing submerged in syrup. At beginning the syrup is not very dense. But gradually your feelings are deepening and you are perceiving the syrup more dense. You should think of the syrup as more dense and expand the range of imagination. Finally you can imagine, that whole universe is full of extremely dense syrup. When you are moving, you can do it only with great difficulty, you can feel great resistance and friction between surface of your body and space around you.

Why should we put stress on stages of work of imagination? Because at beginning the movements are not done properly. If working of imagination is too intensive, it can cause too much mental and physical tension, and affect proper changes between relax and tension. So you should start from mind activity appropriate for the beginning stage, letting your neural system and your muscles get accustomed to the new mode of working. Then the work of imagination is gradually deepened and enhanced, so you can better stimulate neural and muscles systems, making them work more efficiently.

2. SUBTLE, SOFT, SLOW, NATURAL MOVEMENT.

When practicing shi li, during each movement you should feel comfortable force. To achieve this, you should keep relax. When we want to achieve bigger force, we shouldn't use force in normal way. If you would use force in normal way, there would be no hope of developing proper force. In moment of issuing force, there should be sudden contraction of muscles. How could it happen if you were tense before this? So: *"If you are using force, qi becomes stagnant, when qi becomes stagnant, intention stops, when intention stops, spirits is broken, whole body becomes useless"*.

Although shi li is not about using clumsy force, it is not just moving without using force. Form should be "relaxed", but intention should be "tense", *"muscles should contain force, bones should be like blades, whole skeleton should support body, joints should be relaxed and supple, muscles and tendons stretched, being as if relaxed but not loose"*. Like an acrobat walking on a rope is keeping balance and unity of force – there mustn't be even a bit of force unbalanced, breaking the unity of wholeness.

Some beginners are not able to do shi li slowly. Their thoughts are not stable. They could imagine that their body is submerged in dense mud, trying to feel its resistance and stickiness. Or they could imagine, that movements of whole body must be so subtle, as pulling a single silk thread from a cocoon. The thread is extremely thin, so force must be even, subtle and slow, because otherwise the thread could be broken. Just think, can we do movements fast in such a situation? In shi li we should observe and experience our body moving through surrounding air in a relaxed, soft, slow and natural way. *"Think that air is permeating through all pores in your skin, that you are reaching out with all small hair on your body, the slower the movement, the fuller spirit, slow movement is better then fast movement."* These words of Wang Xiangzhai explain, that when practicing shi li, the slower the movement, the more concentrated, more true can be spirit, the stimulation of neural system can be more efficient, resulting in better coordination with muscles system. This way the force expressed by body becomes fuller, more unified.

So, no matter if you practice zhan zhuang or shi li, you should avoid impatience. In yiquan we stress spirit, consciousness and feeling, developing and using of natural force. If practicing shi li you are moving too fast, your thought are becoming unstable and impatient, you are losing the feeling of force, neural and muscles systems are not able to achieve proper coordination and unity. Results of such practice will be shallow, badly affecting development of hunyuan li.

3. PROPER UNDERSTANDING AND USING „CHANGES OF RELAX AND TENSION” DURING THE PROCES OF SEEKING FORCE THROUGH SHI LI TRAINING.

a) Understanding similarities and differences between „changes of relax and tension” in zhan zhuang and shi li.

Putting stress on using imaginations and mind support, when practicing shi li, we continue seeking “opposing forces” by using changes between “relax” and “tension”. So we move from seeking force in very subtle movement in relatively static position of zhan zhuang to long, slow movement of shi li. Although in both cases we are working with changes between “relax” and “tension”, using mind support, the form of exercise is different. In zhan zhuang the process of change between relax and tension is done on a very short way, just a point, and in shi li the movement is much more extended.

Let’s take pingtui shi li as an example. We start from „relax” („relaxed but not loose”). Hands, urged by body are doing movement of pushing forward. Because it is movement in which neural system, muscles, skeleton, all take part, we are talking about the state of “tension”. But this “tension” means that amount of force used is only a little bit bigger than during normal relax. It is a state, when supported by high level of concentration of mind, neural and muscles systems are in state of high coordination. It is different from normal use of force, which would create tension. It is so called “tension in intention”. When you finish the movement of pushing forward, and stop, you are in the state of “relax”. You shouldn’t start movement of pulling back immediately, but check if in this moment of “relax” you are keeping the feeling of unity, of wholeness, of body being connected with surrounding space. After this you can start pulling back, moving from “relax” to “tension” again.

Practicing changes between „relax” and „tension” in shi li, you should remember following points:

- Starting the shi li practice, you should take care that the „tension in intention” is not broken:

Relax	Tension	Relax
Starting position	Process of movement	End position

(There should be no breaks in movement, it should be one continuous movement)

Why is this important? Because when you are starting the practice of shi li, the ability of coordinating neural and muscles systems is not perfect, or is not developed yet. If you are not developing it gradually, in proper way, instead seeking “changes”, it will be “blind changes”, there will be danger of

developing wrong movements and wrong ways of using force.

- When your feelings are deeper and more distinct, you can get rid of the above rule. In pingtui shi li you start from “relax”, doing pushing you change to “tension”, immediately stopping movement (“relax”) and starting it again (“tension”). Repeat it more times, until you achieve final position of movement. As below:

Relax	tension-relax-tension-relax-tension	Relax
Starting position		End position

This kind of changes between relax and tension is like a work of gear-wheels – there is some grating sound. A feeling similar to this grating appears at higher stage of shi li practice. In other word, the path of movement of shi li can be divided into many points. In each point there is change between relax and tension. When someone is watching, shi li seems to be relaxed and slow, as if without force. Actually in each point of movement body is working intensively – there appears subtle vibration – it’s the changes between relax and tension in each point of movement.

Summarizing: the changes of relax and tension in zhan zhuang and in shi li are the same in essence, different is only the form of exercise. In zhan zhuang we are working with changes between relax and tension in one point of movement. In basic shi li exercises the size and time of movement is extended. On higher level of shi li, when neural and muscles systems become better coordinated, the path of movement is divided into many points, in each point there is change between relax and tension. The space and time of changes is becoming shorter. The subtle mo jin of zhan zhuang is used then in shi li. The quality of shi li exercise becomes higher.

b) Understanding the meaning and goal of the changes between “relax” and “tension” in shi li.

Continuous changes between relax and tension in shi li enable the development of sudden and at the same time continuous power of hitting. This is power like a big, high to the sky wave, which is moving a great mountain into ocean. At the same time, through shi li practice, you develop the consciousness of “point”. Because when you practice shi li with partner (tui shou), where your arms come in contact with opponents arms, there is “point”. And this point is changing its position all the time. The changes are unpredictable. The mistake of stiff or loose is result of bad quality of changes between relax and tension at some point. So using and controlling “point” is very important. During the shi li exercise “You want to move, but at the same time you want to stop; you want to stop, but you still want to move; moving you keep stopping, stopping you keep moving”. You should keep this kind of intention in each

point of movement, when practicing shi li. This way you are enhancing the consciousness of “point”. This is basis for tui shou, for attacking and defending skill.

4. SEEKING FORCE THROUGH CHANGES BETWEEN RELAX AND TENSION IS CRUCIAL FOR DEVELOPING OPPOSING FORCES.

Seeking force through changes between relax and tension in shi li is a process of gradually developing the complete system of opposing forces. Wang Xiangzhai said: “When upper wants to move, lower is naturally following; when lower wants to move, upper is naturally leading; when upper and lower move, middle is attacking; when middle is attacking, upper and lower are in harmony – internal and external is connected, front and back, left and right, all is working together”. So when something moves, there is no part of body which is not moving. When some part moves, you should about moving the whole. The characteristic of yiquan shi li is stress on wholeness of movement. The goal is unified force – hunyuan li, or in other words: unified system of opposing forces in whole body.

The force of yiquan can be expressed in many ways. We are talking about accumulating force, elastic force, explosive force, opening force and closing force, force of a braking car, expanding and embracing, inertia, spiral, triangle of forces etc. But the unified system of opposing forces is the core. Without it talking about other forces would be like a shallow essay, without deeper content, without proper meaning.

Wang Xiangzhai said: „Through shi li we can get to know the force, thanks to knowing it we can use it”. Getting to know and using it means getting feeling, experience of unified force (complete system of opposing forces) and actual using it. The basis for developing the complete system of opposing forces is seeking force as a whole. How should we do seeking force as a whole.

Firstly, you should use together all above principles of mind activity and subtle, slow movement. Secondly, you should go through the process of seeking force as a whole gradually, from part to the whole. At beginning, because neural and muscles systems are not accustomed to slow movement practice, it is difficult to achieve their proper coordination. Seeking force as a whole is difficult. So at beginning you can start from a part. Because hands are very sensitive, you can start the work with feeling of resistance from palms, gradually expanding it to forearms, upper arms, chest and belly, legs, back, and finally whole body.

Seeking force in shi li is a process of experiencing it gradually, from part to the whole. How should it be done properly? If you are building a house by piling up pieces of wood, it will be easy to destroy it. Adding parts in such a way doesn't make a strong whole. But linking together elements of reinforced concrete, you can build a skyscraper. The proper whole can be created only by linking together proper parts in proper way. Although in shi li we start from part, finally through mind activity and

appropriate structure of body, we create an organic unity. Then we practice seeking force as a whole, in subtle, slow movement gradually developing unified force.

When we are doing seeking force as a whole (using whole body simultaneously), the developing unified force is also a process from part to the whole. At beginning you can start from simple seeking of two opposing forces. Opposing forces means forces in opposite directions. For example when you are practicing straight punch, you can imagine that between both fists there is a spring, which you are stretching. When front fist is hitting forward, the other is pulling backward, as if you wanted to break the spring. You can think that at some moment the spring is breaking, and this is sudden issuing of force. This *“When front hand is hitting, back hand is issuing force”* means using two opposing forces. All pairs of forces in opposite directions we can call two opposing forces.

When you have some experience with opposing forces in forward-backward, left-right, up-down directions, you should link all of them together. Force should be born in each part of body – they should be as if connected in elastic way, and work together. The feeling of force should be unified. All parts of body should be connected together, as a silk thread making one cocoon, without any holes. When this feeling becomes deeper, you should check if during movement you are keeping feeling of “fullness” in whole body, whether in each point of movement, any situation you are able to issue force. Whether you have feeling as if all small hair on your body was standing up and moving together with surrounding air. Whether you have feeling as if your body was a ball, moving as a whole. If so, it means that you achieved high level of coordination of neural and muscles systems. Abundant and at the same time balanced opposing forces in your whole body and between your body and surrounding space are developed, intention-force in whole body is full, solid, continuous, supple and not dispersed, “spirit – mind – energy – force” are one unit. *“When you start moving, great pleasure is born, your body at last becomes one”*. Movements express kind of natural beauty, like slight wind caressing twigs of a willow tree. This is beauty of nature, of harmony, of spirit. It comes from high level of coordination of neural and muscular systems. In result there appears beauty of balanced, unified force. Achieving this level enables issuing unified force.

Developing opposing forces by seeking force through changes of relax and tension you should remember about following points:

- a) When you are developing the unified opposing forces, during each movement, for example when you are moving your hands forward, you should have intention of force working in opposite direction. The same when you are doing backward movement. The same principle is used with up-down or left-right directions. It is described as “force in direction opposite to movement”. In other words: *„When pushing forward, think of force which is pulling back, when lifting upward, think about force which is pressing down, when expanding outward, think of force which is embracing inward, all those forces*

are fighting for center". The center means center of balance. In shi li, no matter in which direction is the movement, the feeling of forces in opposite directions must be balanced. Without it you will not conform to the demand of unity and balance. Small mistake can result in big problems.

- b) Seeking force in shi li, you should *„start from expanded, improve in tight*". When seeking force, spirit-mind must be open, postures must be expanded and comfortable. Only then you will be able to discover your weak points. Then, gradually, you can shorten the postures and movements, to make your shi li practice more subtle. When movement is shorter, concentration is more intense, you achieve higher level of stimulation of neural and muscular systems. The quality of seeking force improves. This is like sculptor's work. At beginning you have a stone. Then there appears first outline. But this is not the final goal. Much more work on precise details is needed, before the beautiful art of work will be created.
- c) At beginning you should choose one kind of shi li, and after getting some experience and feeling give more attention to other shi li exercises. Although there are various forms of shi li, like (playing with water), kaihe (opening and closing), fu'an qiu (pressing a ball) etc, but the main idea is seeking and developing of hunyuan li – the unified force. So at beginning you can concentrate on one of shi li exercises, and after some time start practicing other. This way you will actually save time and make your training more efficient. If you are trying to learn to many shi lis at once, it will be too much of too complicated stuff. It will not be good for working with feeling of force.
- d) Proper use of „root” and „twigs”. Although it is demanded that intention (force) reaches tips of fingers, you shouldn't neglect „roots” of arms and body. You should be aware that body is basis for the intention (force) reaching fingers. For example, when doing kaihe shi li, you should think of feeling of resistance forces not only around you fingers, palms, forearms and elbows, but even more you should think about “root” or arms – the upper arm and shoulders area, where you should get the same feeling. You should also feel the opening and closing in your body. You can imagine, that when you are doing opening, a crevice appears in center of your body, and it disappears when you are doing closing. When pressing down in fu'an qiu shi li, you should think not only that your arms are pressing the empty ball floating on surface of water, but also that there is connection between chest and belly and the balloon, and they also take part in pressing the balloon down. At the same time you are sitting down, legs bending, your buttocks pressing down. Movement of body is leading the movement of hands pressing balloon. So in shi li it is movement not only of „twigs”, but it's body supporting this movement – you achieve result of their cooperation. This is like children playing drum with two small balls linked to it. The rotation of the drum causes

the balls move. The principle of shi li is that when one part is moving, whole body is moving. When there is movement, there is no part which is not moving. But you should also remember about “twigs”. The proper method is linking “root” and “twigs” together. When practicing shi li, you should not only think about „twigs”, but even more about whole body, imagining as if you were swimming in the air – there is no place of your body, where the feeling of being embraced by the air is not present. Body is like an empty bag hanging in the air – there is no place where the feeling of bulging (as a result of the bag being filled by the wind) is not present. Summarizing: linking „root” and „twigs” is crucial. Body is the „root”, it supports „twigs”. This is important for proper practice of shi li.

- e) Following movements must be closely linked. The characteristic of tui shou and san shou of yiquan is that when there appears contact with opponent’s body, there comes a continuous series of powerful attacks. This continuity depends on the frequency of changes between relax and tension in zhan zhuang and shi li exercises. When doing zhan zhuang, very important is keeping relax and subtlety, while doing changes between relax and tension. You should put attention to the feeling of sticky connection, lingering, tightness. In shi li the movement is extended, but you still should put attention to the same kind of feeling. You shouldn’t make a break after one movement, and only after this start next movement. You shouldn’t stop. During continuous, lingering movement, there appear slight oscillations - changes between relax and tension. The faster those changes, the more continuous, and at the same time more powerful can be fa li. Because the ability of fast changes means high level of coordination of neural and muscular systems, using at a given moment the power of whole body in one point becomes possible. Continuity in shi li is very important. It is also important if at the same time you are able to keep the feeling of lingering and stickiness. Ability of continuous attack and defense, to keep full power and big tempo of changes is directly related to the quality of shi li. So called pulsating of force in whole body is this kind of fast oscillation – continuous changes from relax to tension, from tension to relax.
- f) At last it must be stressed, that no matter which shi li you practice, you should remember about keeping the feeling of „tension” (as if there was a spring or a piece of rubber there) between your head and front foot, between back hip and front knee. Only then your body can be full of unified, round power, like an opened umbrella.

After learning the above principles, you should use them to check if you are practicing shi li properly.

The main shi li exercises, can be divided into 12 kinds in 4 categories.

First category. 3 kinds of basic shi li pingtui (level pushing), boshui (playing with water) and kaihe (opening and closing). These exercises are relatively simple, so you can use them at beginning of learning shi li. This is why they are called basic shi li.

Second category. 3 kinds of tui shou shi li: fu'an qiu (pressing a ball), gougua (hooking-pulling), fengua (separating-pulling). These movements are often used in pushing hands, hence the name tui shou shi li.

Third category. 3 kinds of body method shi li: xuanfa (whirling), yaofa (swaying), shengui chushui (divine turtle emerging from water). In these exercises stress is put on working of body, hence the name body method shi li.

Fourth category. 3 kinds of hitting shi li: cepi (side chopping), zhengpi (vertical chopping), huanrao pifa (circling and chopping). In these exercises stress is put on hitting (chopping) methods used in combat, hence the name hitting shi li

In pingtui shi li, gougua shi li, xuanfa shi li stress is put on working with force in forward-backward direction.

- In pingtui shi li we practice mainly pushing and pulling.
- In gougua shi li we put stress on forearms, practicing, lifting, hooking and pulling-leading.
- In xuanfa shi li, although body is moving forward and backward, there is also movement to the side, and again inward, and hands are doing horizontal circle, representing „whirling”. In this shi li stress is put on working of body. At the same time this is a method often used in tui shou and san shou.

Boshui, fu'an qiu and shengui chushui shi li, put stress on working with upward and downward force:

- In boshui shi li we practice moving water with sweep of the arms upward and downward.
- In fu'an qiu we practice lifting and pressing down.
- In shen gui chu shui shi li we practice body upward and downward movement. At the same time there is work with forward-backward and left-right directions. This is the most difficult of shi li exercises, so it is introduced as the last.

Kaihe, fengua and yaofa shi li, put stress on the force in the left and right directions.:

- In kaihe shi li we practice opening and closing.
- In fengua shi li we practice diagonal separating.
- In yaofa shi li we work with body moving sideways.

In hitting shi li: cepi, zhengpi, huanrao pifa, we mainly practice chopping of various angles.

Some people will ask here, if the principle of yiquan is not that there are no techniques? Why should we practice so many shi li exercises then? Someone asked Yao Zongxun about this: „*It is said ‘Lack of method is basis of martial art., even if you learn a method it will be useless’, so why should we learn so many kinds of shi li?*” Yao Zongxun replied: „*You have forgotten following words – ‘One method is not enough, there is no method which is not contained in the art of fist’*”. In other words, although the essence of yiquan is not learning techniques, it doesn’t mean that there are no techniques at all. Analyzing the shi li exercises, we can see, that each of them is putting stress on some other aspect, but all the time it is working with the force related to six surfaces (up, down, left, right, front, back). For example, in pingtui shi li, although the main direction is forward-backward, but when pushing forward, there is also pressing down, squeezing inward and pointing upward. When pulling back, there is also separating sideways, pressing down and lifting up. Although in fu’an qiu shi li the main direction of force is upward-downward, when lifting upward, there should be also squeezing inward, expanding outward, pointing forward, when pressing down, there should be also separating outward, pressing with body backward. Why do we practice this way? Because what we are “testing” in shi li is unified force in three-dimensional space (so called force related to 6 surfaces). In all shi li exercises we work with this force, only some directions are main, and some are supplemental.

- Generally, when the main is forward force, at the same time there is pressing down, squeezing inward and pointing upward.
- When the main is backward force, at the same time there is separating, pressing down and lifting.
- When the main is upward force, at the same time there is forward force, expanding outward and squeezing inward.
- When the main is backward force, at the same time there is pressing backward and separating.
- When the main is force of opening outward, at the same time there is pulling back (slight pressing with body backward), pressing down and lifting.
- When the main is force of closing inward, at the same time there are downward, forward and upward forces.

When you understand the principles of shi li, it doesn’t appear mysterious anymore.

No matter what changes in movement, you keep the principles. In other word, the methods in yiquan, are not superficial, partial techniques, but methods-principles. “No method” about which we say in yiquan is based on “using method”. Only thanks to hard practice on the stage of “using method”, you can move to the stage of “no method”. This is the process about which old masters of xingyiquan said: from clear force (ming jin), through hidden force (an jin) to changing force (hua jin). The ultimate goal is “issuing force according to feeling, according to situation”. If from the beginning you will think only about “formlessness”, it will be like trying to build a wall from withered grass – first wind and rain will destroy it.

Knowing the principles of shi li and technical core of those exercises, how should we deepen shi li practice? We can divide training for 3 stages:

First stage: Shi li in fixed position

Using position typical for jiji zhuang, we practice shi li without steps. There are two types of fixed position shili:

- a) Single shi li in fixed position. At beginning you practice one movement many times. For example you do pingtui shi li. Then you learn and practice next shi li movements, like: kaihe shi li, fu’an qiu, boshui etc. It prepares you for practicing mixed shi li in fixed position.
- b) Mixed shi li in fixed position. You are mixing various shi li movements in freely changing order. So you can do one pingtui movement, and then kaihe movement, fu’an qiu, boshui etc. It prepares you for various changes in fixed position pushing hands practice

Second stage: Shi li with steps

Shi li with steps means that you practice shi li movements together with moca bu steps (moca bu is shi li for legs, it is basis for yiquan steps, it will be described in next chapter). Because there is hands and legs movement at the same time, it enables bigger mobility and more changes, but at the same time it’s more difficult. You need good basis achieved through practice of shi li in fixed position and through moca bu. Without this basis, when you do shi li with steps, the feeling of force will not be strong and clear enough, there will be no good coordination between upper and lower. So you must put enough attention to the basics.

There are two types of shi li with steps:

- a) Single shi li with steps (steps practice will be described in next chapter). You repeat single shi li movement while doing steps forward, and then steps backward. It prepares you for mixed shi li with steps.

- b) Mixed shi li with steps. During one exercise while doing steps forward, and then steps backward, you freely mix, all kinds of shi li movements in changing order. The goal is preparing for various changes in pushing hands with steps and in free fighting.

Third stage: advanced free shi li.

When you can do shi li with steps naturally and with coordination, you can start freely changing the number of steps in each direction, for example: one step forward, one step backward; one step backward, two steps forward; two steps backward, three steps forward etc. Then you can start doing also steps to the sides, turning body etc. You can freely change positions and paths of movements, avoiding any prearranged order.

When is subtle, slow movement, you are able to experience the feeling of fullness of hunyuan li, you should change slow movement into faster movement, big movement into smaller movement. So actually you should practice both slow and fast, big and small movements.

Then you can change both order and rhythm. Because in combat it is impossible to prearrange the fight, you can find yourself in various, changing situations. So in shi, if we are talking about the rhythm of force, lingering is the basis, but at the same time there must be melody, rhythm and pauses, so it can be closer to the demands of combat.

In advanced shi li, no matter what movements and what rhythm of changes, you should keep the feeling of fullness of intention-force, its harmony and unity, and of comfort at the same time. When intention reaches target, force also reaches it. Intention and force are not separated. Finally even the concept of shi li disappeared, you achieve the stage of being natural.

About high level shi li Yao Zongxun said: „*You should be like a flag exposed to wind, like a fish in river. The flag is moving in ways which cannot be predicted – when wind blows, it reacts. Fish is as if moving slightly, but actually it is moved by the movement of water.*”